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“Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing.”

Linking Independent Choice, Sustained Silent Reading, and Comprehension

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study, with an emphasis on quantitative data collection, shed light on the impact of independent choice in a Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program on students' comprehension and feelings about reading. It used one Ninth Grade General Level English class, approximately 21 students overall, in which they received the SSR intervention. Data was collected through surveys, released SOL reading comprehension questions, interviews, and teacher observations. The findings showed that students who participated in SSR with an emphasis on independent choice in reading material made minimal gains in reading comprehension, and ultimately, positively increased students' perceptions of reading. In an effort to counter the National Reading Panel's (2000) finding that SSR had no impact on student comprehension and encouraging students to read is not reflected in student achievement.

Reading has become a mundane skill that gets shoved into backpacks, obligatorily written in agenda books, and pushed under beds. With such a push from standardized assessments and measurements, students do not see the importance or relevancy of reading in their everyday lives.

In my time as an English student and teacher, I have encountered such phrases as, “Why do we need to read this?” “Why can’t we read something interesting?” “Why can’t the curtains just be blue?! Why does it have to mean he is sad?!” While they may seem like exclamations from students who simply do not want to do work or those that hate being stuck in the monotonous routine of school, these questions actually offer a strong insight into the role of reading in the classroom. Due to my personal interest in English, I have developed a fascination with finding the hidden significance behind making the curtain *mean* something more or explaining the symbolism behind the green light in *The Great Gatsby*. Mottel (2011) stated that, “for students who don’t care about the green light or what it means, it could be torture, especially if this is a question that is gathered with 30 other questions on a worksheet, back and front” (p. 33). Reading has become a chore; the same texts are taught each year; the same standardized tests measure comprehension. With the looming presence of high-stakes testing, reading has become “read this passage and answer the following questions” with no regard for student interest or opinion.

Yoon (2002), Ivey and Johnston (2013), and Kasten and Wilfong (2007) all acknowledged that student engagement and motivation to read are impacted when the materials are relevant to students’ lives. Students appreciate when they are given a choice; they appreciate when something is personally relatable. One way to give students this sense of autonomy in their learning is through the implementation of a Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program in which

students have, for the most part, complete independent choice in their readings. Generally, SSR programs allowed students to read a *book* for a set amount of time either at the beginning or end of a class period. The idea was to give students a chance to read for “fun” and develop a stronger relationship with the reading process. However, SSR, for the most part, has been an effective way to encourage reading and thereby reading achievement.

According to the National Reading Panel (2000) report, fluency in reading is the gateway to student comprehension of texts. The report compared the impact of Guided Oral Reading (GOR) and the implementation of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) in the classroom, finding that SSR had no influence on students’ reading comprehension and encouraging reading had no effect on reading achievement (National Institute, 2000). Because of such findings, GOR became the primary mode of reading instruction; therefore, placing an emphasis on fluency measurements. The measurement of fluency is defined as “the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression” (National Institute, 2000, p. 3-1), and ultimately, it “has been described as the ‘most neglected’ reading skill” (National Institute, 2000, p. 3-1). Due to this neglect of fluency, and the success of GOR, silent reading has been placed on the backburner as a mode for promoting reading and comprehension.

In spite of the National Reading Panel’s findings, silent reading has drawn much debate about whether or not these methods are an effective measure. Most research viewed the ability to read expressively and with speed as the critical components of fluency and mastery of reading skill; however, it has also served as a catalyst for studies on the impact of SSR in the classroom.

While students’ reading comprehension skills are a vital component of reading in the classroom, the National Reading Panel’s (2000) findings highlighted an issue with most reading comprehension measurements.

Therefore, the research question is as follows: What impact, if any, does independent choice in a Sustained Silent Reading program have on student comprehension and overall feelings about reading? The purpose of this research is to determine whether full independent choice in a Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program promotes positive feelings about reading and thereby influences students' comprehension due to engagement and motivation to read.

Key Terms

For the purpose of this research I identified Sustained Silent Reading as a set amount of time before or at the end of class in which students are allowed to read a chosen text. With regards to "feelings about reading," I referenced students' past experiences with reading, their experiences within class and it's positive/negative impact on their perceptions of reading, how often they read, why they do or do not read, and the type of environment they read in. Finally, for comprehension, I focused on students' ability to identify the main ideas in a passage as well as their ability to contextualize vocabulary.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to delve into current research on different effective and ineffective aspects of an SSR program in relation to student interest and comprehension. The idea was to gain insight into what kinds of restrictions and regulations have caused success and failures. It addressed the impact of current tests and assessments versus silent reading on comprehension, compared silent versus oral participation in the reading process, students motivation to read, the effect of Sustained Silent Reading and the components used to create effective programs: independence, environment, and accountability. This research took into consideration all views, opposing and congruent. Within the research, there were a few gaps that presented themselves and serve as a foundation for the purpose of this research.

Impact of Tests and Assessments on Reading Comprehension

Rather, the emphasis on word accuracy, speed, and expression, researchers indicated a multitude of standardized, high-stakes test to measure students' reading comprehension. The need for standardized assessment test such as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Essential Literacy (DIBELS) and The Gray Oral Reading Test- Fourth Edition (GORT-4) subjected oral reading comprehension level to words per minute, WCMP. Silent reading comprehension was also assessed with standardized tests, such as the Test of Reading Comprehension – Fourth Edition (TORC-4), which was divided into five sub-tests: relational vocabulary, sentence completion, paragraph construction, text comprehension, and contextual fluency, where fluency was just one part of the larger whole (Paige et al., 2014, p. 131). There was limited research on simply measuring a students' comprehension based on understanding a piece of text through the students' ability to discuss and identify main ideas in relation to their personal connections. Regardless of oral or silent reading, high stakes testing can put a cap on the type of

comprehension that was attained especially when most tests measure words per minute as reflective of overall student comprehension.

In this research, reading comprehension measurement focused on those students who have a poor relationship with reading comprehension; thus, a portion of results on successes and failures have come from those students that struggle in reading (Hiebert et al., 2012 & Paige et al., 2014). Due to such an emphasis on WCMP and standardized measurements, “struggling readers may come to perceive reading as nothing more than word calling” (Hiebert et al., 2012, p. 111). Reading then becomes about *how many* words instead of the *meaning* of those words, enhancing the lack of text understanding in struggling readers. According to Hiebert et al. (2012), the “emphasis needs to be on sustaining meaningful comprehension at appropriate rates across numerous stages” (p. 120). With such a strong focus on speed without any attention on actual attainment, instruction and assessment have “the potential to adversely affect comprehension and knowledge acquisition” (Hiebert et al., 2012, p. 113). With these types of testing, the idea of gaining a deeper understanding of texts was less relevant to a student’s comprehension.

Impact of Silent Reading on Reading Comprehension

Owing to the National Reading Panel findings, there was little support in the impact of silent reading on overall reading comprehension. However, in their study, Paige et al. (2014) found there were significant gains in silent reading fluency reflected in standardized scores through the implementation of reading programs that are focused, repeated, and accountability driven. Additionally, Cuevas and Russell (2014) researched a similar gap in the impact of increased text exposure and the implementation of independent silent reading (ISR) on reading comprehensions. The control group, which did not partake in ISR, made the predicted grade

level gains in reading ability and comprehension that are to be expected under normal circumstances; however, the two ISR treatment groups “gained twice as much as the control group in terms of grade equivalency” (p. 151). Both of these studies provided a counter claim to the National Reading panel and in turn highlighted a major impact of SSR programs.

Cuevas et al. (2014) acknowledged that if the students in their study had consistently read grade-level material outside of the class, then the ISR reading sessions would not have yielded “any measureable change at all” (p. 151). This touched on the issue of students’ lack of exposure to reading and the out-of-class support needed to enhance overall student reading skills. Such a solution was often an intended outcome of SSR programs.

Oral versus silent participation in reading. Even though there have been gains in the effectiveness of silent reading, “repeated reading and other guided oral reading procedures have clearly been shown to improve fluency and overall reading achievement” (National Institute, 2000, p. 3-28). Because of this, a strong emphasis has been placed on oral instructional strategies for reading. The support for such a strategy was given more support due to the fact that it does not need extra materials and special training or structures; whereas, an extra supply of reading materials and time for teacher training have been indicated to run an effective SSR program. However, while most research categorized prosody with verbalization as a means for promoting fluency, there were some studies that acknowledged eye movements during silent reading as an indicator of prosody (Hiebert et al., 2012; Paige et al., 2014).

Regardless of findings on the impact of oral reading versus silent reading, Hiebert et al. (2012) acknowledged, “when the diet becomes skewed, as we believe it has, the prospects of the poor getting poorer are likely” (p. 111). This emphasized the need to inter-mingle silent and oral reading within reading instruction if any gains were going to be made in students’ understanding

and comprehension of texts. However, as a result of the finding in the National Reading Panel that supported oral reading enhanced fluency and reading comprehension, and SSR had no impact, “the pendulum swung to an almost-exclusive emphasis on oral reading” (Hiebert et al., 2012, p. 110). According to Hiebert et al. (2012), there was an assumption that the use of oral practices would enhance overall reading comprehension in silent reading, but as of now, there has been no significant correlation between oral and silent reading.

Students’ Motivation to Read

Most of these tests, measurements, and assessments were not reflective of students’ genuine desire and willingness to read – a major aspect of SSR in the classroom. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found “student assessment showed that most 15-year-olds worldwide do not read for enjoyment,” (Yoon, 2002, p. 186) and according to Henry, for those that do read, “most do for less than an hour per day out of school” (as cited in Yoon, 2002, p. 186). To stifle this lack of interest, Kasten and Wilfong’s (2007) suggested “people gravitate towards activities when they believe they are good at them and see themselves in certain roles” (p. 2); researchers found the need to create readers who will be motivated by their own skills. A foundation for this motivation was the need for students “to see literacy as personally relevant and having substance for their lives” (Kasten et al., 2007, p. 2). There needed to be a level of personal engagement with the text in order for students to develop motivation and relationships with reading. Within this engagement, Ivey and Johnston (2013) found “readers are ‘motivated to read, strategic in their approaches to comprehending what they read, knowledgeable in their construction of meaning from text, and socially interactive while reading’” (p. 255). These aspects of motivation are only achieved when readers were able to relate and make meaningful connections to their texts. Ivey et al. (2013) suggested that using

adult literature as a means for that connection brought to light the use of contemporary pieces due to the fact that those texts “are responsive to the emotional and cultural challenges young people face in their everyday lives” (Ivey et al., 2013, p. 257). Such a finding highlighted the need for student motivation not only in the classroom but also the need for support and consistency in connecting students outside of the classroom.

Effect of Sustained Silent Reading

The final finding in the National Reading Panel was that regardless of schools’ desire to “encourage students to read more and that these increases in reading practice will be translated into better fluency and higher reading achievement, there is not adequate evidence to sustain this claim” (National Institute, 2000, p. 3-28). In light of this finding, researchers took to many different methods and implementations of effective SSR programs. One teacher-researcher, Dickerson (2015), adapted her own SSR program that allowed for not only her students to alter their perspectives and perceptions on her role as a teacher, but her views on the students as learners. Dickerson (2015) noticed that by the end, her students saw her “as a fellow reader with whom they can talk about books” (p. 7), and she saw her students’ “natural analytical strengths, remember their passion for learning, and better understand their lives and personality” (p. 7). At the end, Dickerson (2015) noticed levels of improvement, ranging from one to three grade levels; however, she claimed, “this cannot be linked directly to independent reading in Reading Zone since the students read a variety of other texts both in my class and in other classes” (p. 2). While she had an effective program, her emphasis on qualitative data collection could offer a limitation to her overall findings. While Dickerson (2015) claimed her students gained a love of reading, it did not show a direct impact on their actual comprehension skills; therefore, SSR is challenging to measure without direct testing.

The lack of direct correlation with reading improvement and SSR programs was only one of the issues that researchers have encountered. Chua (2008) conducted a time-series design study with approximately 218 secondary students in which he had teachers present students with a questionnaire three times over a twelve month period to gauge student progress with SSR reading habits and attitudes toward reading for fun. What the results indicated was a negative influence that leads to “the possible lessening of students’ interest in reading” (p. 181). One theme within the impact of sustained silent reading was the idea that it will promote reading outside of the classroom and increase students’ overall love of reading. However, within Chua’s (2008) study, found that SSR “cultivated students’ reading habits in SSR period but did not have a significant effect on students’ pleasure and enjoyment of reading” (p. 183-4). Regardless of such findings, the finding in the National Reading Panel acknowledges, “no matter how many studies show a lack of effect due to an instructional routine, it is always possible that under some yet-unstudied condition the procedure could be made to work” (National Institute, 2000, p. 3-27). This left the impact of SSR open-ended and in need of further research.

Because of this uncertainty, researchers provided some debate on the effectiveness of a Sustained Silent Reading program. Siah and Kwok (2010) suggested “the SSR program is more effective for students who have a high value of reading than for students who have a low value of reading” (p. 173). Most teachers and researchers implemented an SSR program in order to enhance students’ relationship with reading, which generally highlighted helping struggling readers. There was an issue with still forcing students to read and taking away the “fun,” and therefore, the effectiveness.

Value of Independence in Reading

Due to the findings that SSR programs did not promote a love of reading, and the findings that student motivation to read comes from relevant engagement, the idea of independence in reading became a possible solution. Two of the main skills that presented themselves within the research are students' use of independent choice in what they get to read, and their sense of agency.

Within Dickerson's (2015) SSR program, she implemented five rules, two of which provide students with the options to make their own decisions: "a book is a book" and "we are free to ditch our books" (p. 7). She "wanted [her] students to have more reading stamina and more choice in their own education" (Dickerson, 2015, p. 5). According to Kasten et al., (2007) "students need to be able to choose what they read at least most of the time and especially until they are firmly and unshakably hooked into reading" (p. 2). The lack of restriction and censoring within Dickerson's (2015) SSR catered to the idea that "different people have different interests, and they should be honored" (p. 7). Giving students choice promoted a sense of autonomy and willingness to participate.

In Ivey et al.'s (2013) study on young adult literature and student engagement, they found "students had a substantially stronger sense that they could have an effect on things: their own reading, social relationships, emotions, and life narratives" (p. 263). With the idea of making reading interesting and relevant to student interests, students became more willing to learn and develop reading skills on their own. For instance, the researchers observed a student named Katrina writing down all of the characters' names while reading as a "way of keeping characters straight when perspectives shifted across chapters" (Ivey et al., 2013, p. 263); her interest in the book pushed her to want to comprehend the text as a whole and on her own terms. Parr (2005) concludes,

Within the practice of SSR, students are given the freedom to exercise choice (of reading material) and agency (to read or not) as they are in the real, nonschool world. Choice is motivating and is important in promoting independence (Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998) for adolescents at a time when the need to construct an identity is pressing (p. 98).

As discussed in the section about student motivation, access to materials that are relevant and engaging lead to a stronger desire to read; independent choice and a sense of agency contribute to students' overall motivation and relevancy to reading because they are able to make reading about them.

Impact of Environment

Additionally, with the implementation of an independent SSR program, many researchers discussed the extreme need for structure, routine, and support to have an effective outcome. Dickerson (2015) implemented five sets of rules within her classroom to offer routine and support: a book is a book; I read, too; talk about books; write about books; free to ditch books; whereas, Lee (2011) used Pilgreen's eight factors to an effective SSR program: access, appeal, conducive environment, encouragement, staff training, non-accountability, follow up activities, and time to read. Both received positive outcomes in their programs. The one characteristic that all, mostly effective, SSR programs have was a set of specific guidelines that are implemented in order to make the students experience more comfortable and independent (Dickerson, 2015; Lee, 2011). Teachers gave students as much time to read as they desired, but "opportunities to read that lack structure and support often fail to produce the hoped-for outcomes" (Hiebert et al., 2012, p. 114). With student autonomy in instruction comes the need for specific directions and regulations.

Routine and structure. From the research, the impact of a consistent routine and daily structure, not only increased the effectiveness of an SSR program, but according to Dickerson (2015), she also experienced minimal disruptive behaviors. By simply setting up an SSR program as just grabbing a book and reading, students were not given direction or opportunity to fully experience the value of independent reading. Researchers showed that SSR was not effective when it was randomly assigned without consistency, and the “support for optimal comprehension-based silent reading rates needs to be viewed as a long-term endeavor with different emphases at different points” (Hiebert et al., 2012, p. 120). It was a long process that needs constant reassurance.

However, without this type of consistency “students often engage in what some teachers have called ‘fake reading’” (Hiebert et al., 2012, p. 114). A main concern within the research was the ability for students to see the routine and structure as a period of time where they get to sit in the classroom and do nothing. Lee (2011), experienced this issue during her first go-around with an SSR program – “many students sauntered over to the book-shelf and grabbed the first book they touched. Some students slept; others passed notes. I even caught one student asleep behind an upside down book” (p. 211). This contributed to the aforementioned fact that SSR may only be effective for those who already value reading.

Modeling. Another major aspect of an effective SSR program was the idea of teacher modeling. This notion was one of Dickerson’s (2015) five rules: “I read, too” (p. 7). Many researchers touch on the impact of surrounding students with role models that show the enjoyment and engagement of reading for fun: parents, teachers, peers, administrators. In fact, many schools have attempted to implement such programs as Drop Everything and Read in which the entire school ranging from secretaries to math classes, was obligated to stop

instruction and read. Bandura stated, “Human behavior is learned in part by observation and imitation” (as cited in Yoon, 2002, p. 188). The foundation for teacher modeling within the SSR program was based on the notion that adolescents needed to *see* the importance and relevance of instruction to be willing to participate in it. According to Yoon (2002), “teacher modeling as nonverbal feedback plays a crucial role in fostering children’s reading attitude” (p. 188).

Modeling reading during SSR made a connection between teacher and student; if a student saw an authority figure participating in the same activity and being held accountable for the same outcomes, they were more likely to be willing participate themselves. Kasten et al. (2007) emphasized the need to “read to your students, share with them about your own book choices, and let them notice that you are a reader” (p. 6). While teacher modeling involved reading silently with students, it could also be effective through discussions and simple presence of books in the classroom.

On the other hand, there was an issue with maintaining structure and routine during teacher modeling. Many teachers would love to just sit down and read for 20 minutes, just like their students. However, as mentioned in the routine and structure section, monitoring student participation in SSR can diminish your role as a model. During her first attempt, Lee (2011) acknowledged that during her modeling time, she ended up spending the majority of it dealing with behavior management. In order to have an effective program, all students must be reading during the designated time, which required the teacher to constantly look around, address problems, and correct behaviors, taking away from teacher modeling.

Accountability

With the issue of maintaining structure and ensuring all students were participating comes the controversial decision on whether holding students accountable would foster

participation or enhance disdain for the reading process. Within Pilgreen's handbook on an effective SSR program, she stated that to be successful, teachers should "omit any activity that gives students the message that they are responsible for completing a task, comprehending a particular portion of their reading, or showing that they have made improvement in some way" (as cited in Lee, 2011, p. 214). When the purpose was to create life-long readers and promote reading for leisure, one teacher responded, "reading should be a spark to ignite a fire – heavy accountability tends to throw water on that spark" (as cited in Yoon, 2002, p. 189). Researchers struggled with this aspect of SSR, but some impose restrictions such as allowing students to read whatever interests them without the obligation of receiving a grade or completing an assignment (Cuevas et al., 2014; Dickerson, 2015; Lee, 2011; Siah et al., 2010; Yoon, 2002). It then became about deciding whether to make reading completely optional or getting and monitoring feedback.

In contrast, Cuevas et al. (2014) believed that to ensure students read independently, they need to "follow through with that reading with the use of accountability measures such as adjunct questions" (p. 150). In Dickerson's (2015) classroom, she implemented the use of readers' notebooks that allowed students to track what they read, sentence beginners that utilized different Bloom's Taxonomy levels, and kept a class wide tracker of each students' book list in order to hold students accountable for their reading. In her study, students tended to have a better relationship with reading by the end of SSR. Ultimately, accountability goes back to the idea that SSR may be more promising for those that already appreciate the reading process, "it may lead active readers to invent ways of showing the autonomy of their reading...while for reluctant readers it may be so threatening that they never experience the pleasure of reading" (Yoon, 2002, p. 188). Reading for leisure was a hard skill to teach in a setting that placed such an emphasis on standards and high stakes testing.

Gap in Research

Within these different research studies, a common theme presents itself in the lack of access to different materials. Many, if not all, of the studies pushed students to read books during the SSR period. Traditionally, this means novels, books with chapters, a lot of pages, and an overwhelming feeling. While the ultimate goal was to create life-long readers, imposing any type of restriction on the material can cause students to enhance their aversion to reading. Based on research, the need to allow students to read *anything*, such as magazines, newspapers, articles found on social media, poetry, or short stories, is an aspect of SSR that has yet to be explored.

Additionally, there has been little research on whether inserting class discussions and other oral comprehension strategies about students' readings *after* the designated SSR time could enhance the effectiveness on reading comprehension. Based on research, there needs to be a balance of both silent and oral in order to promote full student achievement and give purpose to SSR programs.

Methods

A growing problem in adolescents is the lack of reading that plays a role in their lives outside of classroom. In part, this issue stems from students' disengagement with texts that pose no relevance to their daily societal lives (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Because of this lack of autonomy in reading, students have come to view it as an assignment rather than an enjoyable skill. The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of independent choice in a Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program on student comprehension and feelings about reading.

Participants

For the purpose of this research, the study took place in a high school located within a suburban area in Central Virginia. The focus centered on eight Ninth Grade General English students. There were no identified disabilities or accommodations, and within the class, approximately 25% were Black, 15% were Hispanic, 50% were White, and 10% fell under Non-AYP race. Students and parents/guardians were administered consent and assent letters to ensure all data was collected with willing participation.

Within the school districts' student population there were approximately .05% Asian, 25% Black, 20% Hispanic, 50% white and .05% Non-AYP Race, with an overall approximation of 40% of students on free and reduced lunch. There was a population of 13% Gifted Education students and 12% Special Education students. Additionally, the county catered to approximately 300 different languages, which brought the ESOL student population to about 5%.

Procedure

Over a two-week period, students were engaged with Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) in approximately five different 90-minute block periods. All students partook in a pre-test prior to intervention that gauged students' feelings about reading and their comprehension level. I

administered the same assessment as their post-test after they completed the five-session intervention. During the intervention, both sets of students participated in some form of reading comprehension strategy, which is outlined in the following section.

For the purposes of SSR, students followed seven guidelines that I adapted from Dickerson's five rules and Pilgreen's eight steps to an effective SSR program (Dickerson, 2013; Lee, 2011). Prior to the intervention, I discussed with the students what an SSR program entails; I asked them if they have ever encountered one, and if so, what kinds of rules were set in place. Once this was established, I pulled up the seven guidelines I wanted them to follow, and we talked through them as a class. These guidelines were followed for the entire duration, five classroom meetings, of the intervention:

1. Same Daily Routine: Students will come in before the tardy bell rings, decide what they will be reading during SSR, and find their spot in the room.
2. Conducive Environment: The students will be allowed to sit anywhere they want in the room (i.e. floor or desk)
3. Set Amount of Time: Students will read silently for 15 minutes.
4. Choose your Material: Students will be allowed to read a text of their choosing. While the point of this is to have zero restriction on student choice, students will be made aware that the content is school appropriate and scrolling through social media or text messages on their phones does not constitute "reading." There will be access to books, magazines, and newspaper in addition to students' own resources.
5. Free to ditch: Students can, at any point, get rid of their chosen text and choose something different.
6. Teacher Modeling: The teacher will participate in SSR along with the students.

7. Follow-up Activities: The teacher will model process out loud, and then the students will fill out an end of reading worksheet.

The follow up-activity was the same after each intervention to offer consistency. It took the form of a small packet that I collected at the end of each session. Upon completing the activity, students put their reading materials away and handed in their worksheets.

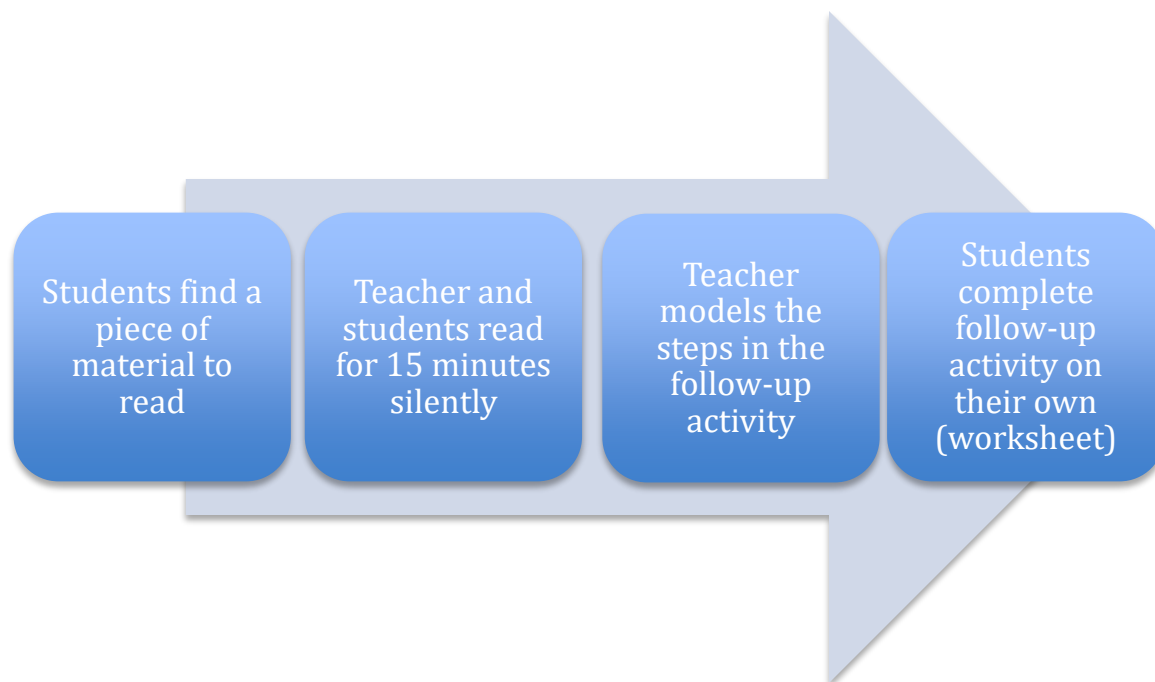


Figure 1. *Process During Sustained Silent Reading. This figured lists the steps that will take place during the SSR intervention.*

Measurements

Prior to student involvement in SSR, students took two pre-tests. First, students were given a Likert Scale Reading Interest Survey (See Appendix A) that gauged their relationship and feelings about reading.

Second, they answered seven multiple choice questions on a passage titled “No Frozen Fish Here!,” which I took from an end-of-the-year released SOL test (See Appendix B) to assess

their reading comprehension ability (Virginia Standards of Learning, 2015). This passage and its questions were chosen based on the type of reading comprehension strategies that were administered during the interventions. Based on findings in research, it was hard to identify a direct measurement of SSR on comprehension; my mentor teacher had been using Guided Oral Reading (GOR) as the primary mode of instruction prior to this intervention. Therefore, the pre-test showed their comprehension skills based on solely oral instruction, and the post-test showed whether the SSR intervention increased, decreased, or had no impact on their skills.

Once students completed the pre-test requirements, the class began SSR. The participants completed a guided worksheet (See Appendix C) at the end of each session where they were expected to write a brief summary, identified one vocabulary word with a definition based on contextual clues, and provided feedback on their SSR experience for that day by circling a happy, sad, or neutral smiley face. Before they completed their worksheets, I provided instructions on how to complete the SSR worksheet.

In this environment, I noted teacher observations in which pseudonyms were applied to all student names and interactions. At the end of SSR, all students re-took the Likert Scale Reading Interest Survey (See Appendix A) and released SOL reading comprehension questions (See Appendix B) on the passage “No Frozen Fish” that gauged student improvement, if any.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this mixed-methods study, there was emphasis on quantitative data collection. Within the quantitative data, I took responses to a Likert Scale Survey and broke down the number of students who pick 1, 2, or 3 on each of the 10 questions and placed it in a table for pre-post comparison. I then coded the 10 survey questions for themes, which were broken down in the discussion. However, as question 10 on the survey was short-answer, I coded a set of separate

themes within those student responses. The survey collection was used to determine students' feelings about reading prior to SSR as compared to their feelings after participating.

As for the SOL reading comprehension questions, I awarded a point value to each question and had a cumulative grade per student at the end of assessment; this resulted in a grade percentage of either A (90-100), B (80-89), C (70-79), D (60-69), or F (59 and below). I used a graph to show the grade percentages across the participants with a table summarizing the mean percentage per intervention. Using graphs and tables; I compared pre and posttest results. A t-test was used to determine if there was statistical significance in reading comprehension after SSR intervention.

Student dialogue was inserted throughout the research as a means of supporting findings. Teacher observations were used to determine the engagement of students during SSR to determine success and failures of the program. Finally, for the SSR follow-up activity, there was no measurement of progress or point scale attached. These were used as a means of practicing reading comprehension skill and ensuring that students were participating in the SSR intervention; therefore, I used teacher observations to analyze the follow-up activity.

Findings

For this study, I received feedback from eight 9th grade general level English students. Using a likert scale reading interest survey, a released SOL reading comprehension test, and teacher observations data were collected to determine if independent choice in a Sustained Silent Reading program influenced students' perceptions of reading and their overall comprehension. The data is organized into three categories: reading comprehension, feelings about reading, and follow-up.

Reading Comprehension

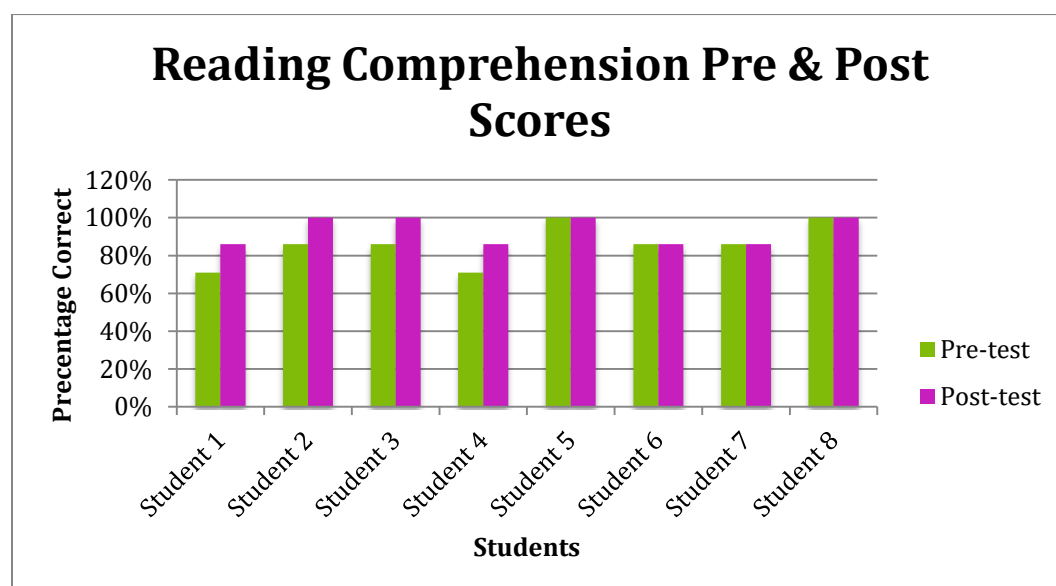
Students received the released SOL Reading Comprehension test before and after completing SSR. The passage and questions were reflective of what kind of reading comprehension instruction the students encountered during the SSR process through the follow-up activity (See Appendix C) I compared pre and post data to gather whether students showed growth in their reading comprehension skill after participating in the SSR intervention. There were five class periods in between the pre and post assessment and looking at Table 1 and Figure 1, the overall average score increased from 85.75% to 93%. Ultimately, there was a level of growth in their skill; however, four of the eight students remained stagnant, two of which scored a 100% on their pre-test. Due to this, there was no way to measure growth in two of the eight participants.

Table 1. *Reading Comprehension Pre/Post-Test Results*

Students	Pre-Test	Post-Test
<i>Student 1</i>	71%	86%
<i>Student 2</i>	86%	100%
<i>Student 3</i>	86%	100%

<i>Student 4</i>	71%	86%
<i>Student 5</i>	100%	100%
<i>Student 6</i>	86%	86%
<i>Student 7</i>	86%	86%
<i>Student 8</i>	100%	100%
Mean Score	85.75%	93%

Figure 2. *Reading Comprehension Pre/Post-Test Results Graph*



Using the scores from the pre and post-test, I conducted a related *t*-test in which the *p*-value of 0.017 showed that the results of the reading comprehension scores were statistically significant.

Even though the *p*-value and class average show a sense of growth in reading comprehension, there was not much room for growth from the beginning in half of the participants. Additionally, most students only improved by one or two questions, so their gains were minimal. Ultimately, there is very little to indicate a strong correlation between their involvement with the SSR process and their improved reading comprehension.

Follow-up

The SSR follow-up activity (See Appendix C) required students to answer two parts: summarize the main idea of their reading and define a new vocabulary term using context clues. Students were not assigned a grade for this assignment and no data was collected to look at student growth or progress. This activity was used as a practice tool and a way to ensure that students participated in SSR each day. However, there were some inconsistencies in student performance. Some days the participants would complete the activity and other days, I would receive blank worksheets. For example, in Figure 2 below, Student 6 did not complete the first day of the worksheet, but he did complete the second day. This is the type of inconsistency that occasionally repeated itself during the SSR intervention.

Figure 3. SSR Follow-up Activity

SSR Worksheet:

1. Summarize:

Write a brief summary of what you read during the 15-minute period. What was the main idea? If you were explaining it to someone who has never read it before, what would they need to know?

2. Vocabulary:

Are there any words that you did not know? Were you able to define them based on the context? Write down the words and give what YOU think it means.

Term 1:

Definition:

3. Reflection: Circle a face. Did you enjoy SSR today?**1. Summarize:**

Write a brief summary of what you read during the 15-minute period. What was the main idea? If you were explaining it to someone who has never read it before, what would they need to know?

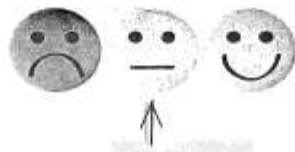
Watson is going back to Africa for a reason I haven't found out. Peter is in prison, he thinks he's dead though. Most of Peter's 12 has been destroyed and all of his other refugees in 12 from 12.

2. Vocabulary:

Are there any words that you did not know? Were you able to define them based on the context? Write down the words and give what YOU think it means.

Term 1: 1/2/1/2/1/2

Definition: 1/2/1/2 or 1/2/1/2

3. Reflection: Circle a face. Did you enjoy SSR today?**Feelings about Reading**

On the other hand, the students were given a likert scale Reading Interest Survey before and after the SSR intervention. This scale measured their overall feelings and experiences with reading through 10 questions: I like to read; I only read books that interest me; reading is only done as a homework assignment; I believe my peers like to read for fun; being able to choose what I want to read makes me want to read more; reading is only important in English class; I feel motivated to read at school; my parents/guardians read on a regular basis; I do not think

reading is important. The last question was a short answer, which asked, how can teacher support you in your reading experience. Below are my findings from the reading interest survey; they are broken into two categories: Likert Scale and short answer.

Likert Scale. Of the nine likert-scale questions, questions one, four, five, six and nine, indicated a positive increase after the implementation of the SSR intervention as indicated in Figure 4 below. The highlighted statements were the ones that yielded a positive increase, and the non-highlighted determine the ones that were either not influenced or decreased.

Figure 4. *Reading Interest Survey*

1. I like to read.

1 2 3

2. I only read books that interest me.

1 2 3

3. Reading is only considered a homework assignment.

1 2 3

4. I believe my peers like to read for fun.

1 2 3

5. Being able to choose what I want to read makes me want to read more.

1 2 3

6. Reading is only important in English class.

1 2 3

7. I feel motivated to read at school.

1 2 3

8. My parents/ guardians read on a regular basis.

1 2 3

9. I do not think reading is important.

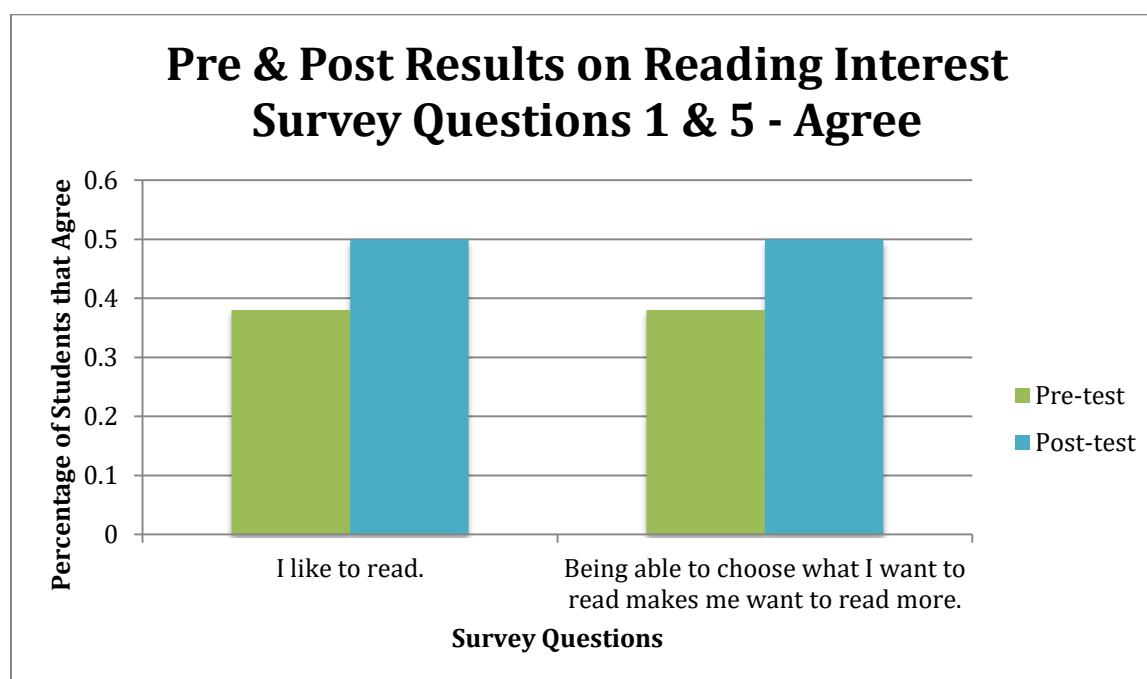
1 2 3

Below I have broken down each Likert Scale questions into tables and graphs in order to better see the response rate of the Reading Interest Survey. The tables and graphs are broken into three categories: positive increase, negative increase, and stagnant.

Positive Increase. Below are the five questions that yielded a positive response rate.

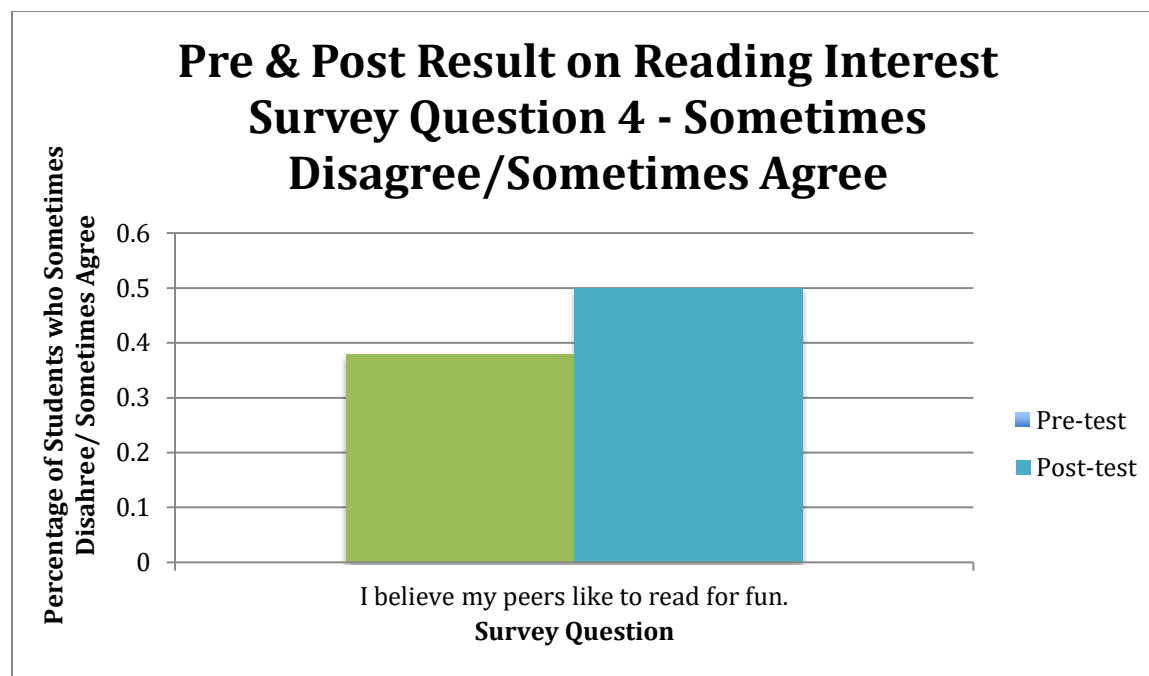
Figure 5 indicated a positive response rate in that students *agreed* with the statements. For Question one, participants increased in agreement from 38% to 50%. For Question five, students increased in agreement from 38% to 50% as well. These results agree with previous research that state students are more likely to read when they are able to choose their own material.

Figure 5. *Graph of Pre/Post Results to Question 1 and 5 as Measured by Agreement with Statement*



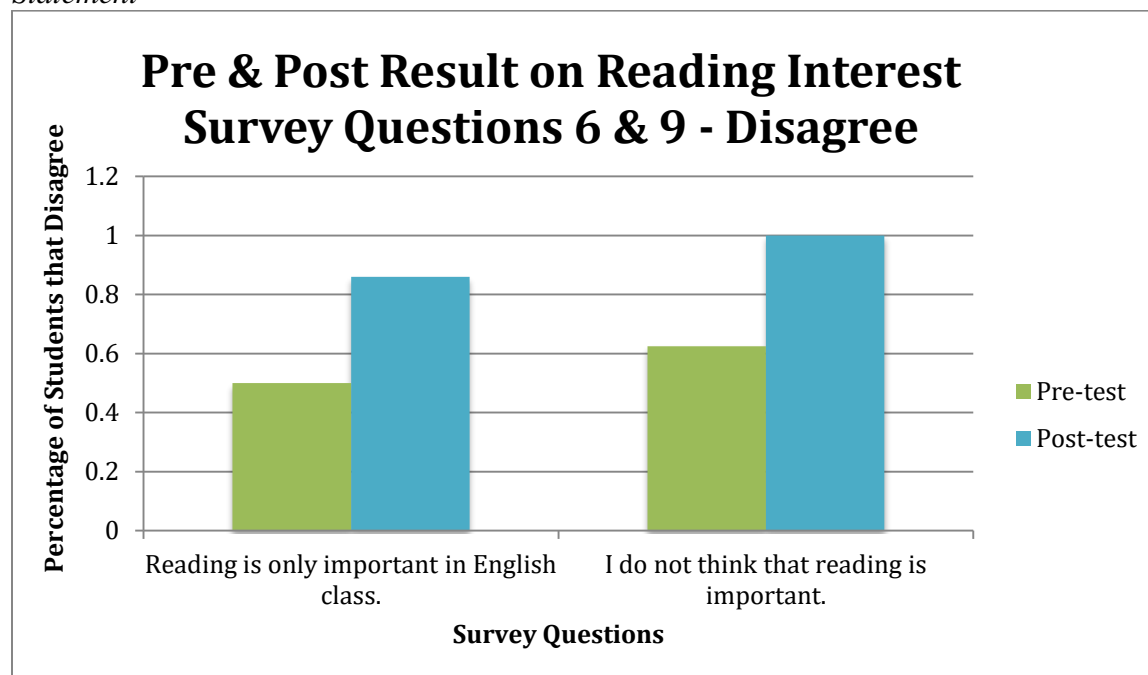
For Figure 6, there was a positive increase in a *neutral* standpoint – no participant fully agreed that his or her peers enjoyed reading for fun. This means that students increased from 38% sometimes disagree/sometimes agree to 50% sometimes disagree/sometimes agree. However, there was an increase from students completely disagreeing with the statement to only sometimes disagreeing that their peers like to read.

Figure 6. *Graph of Pre/Post Results to Question 4 as Measured by a Neutral Agreement with the Statement*



In Figure 7 below, response rates indicate a positive increase if students *disagreed* with the statement. For question six, students disagreed that reading is only important in English class at 50%, then after SSR intervention, students disagreed at 86% -- more students believed that reading was important outside of English. For question nine, students increased from 62.5% disagree to 100% disagree that they do not think reading is important. As you can see in Figure 5, there is a large increase in students' perception that reading is an important skill.

Figure 7. *Graph of Pre/Post Results to Questions 6 and 9 as Measured by Disagreement with the Statement*

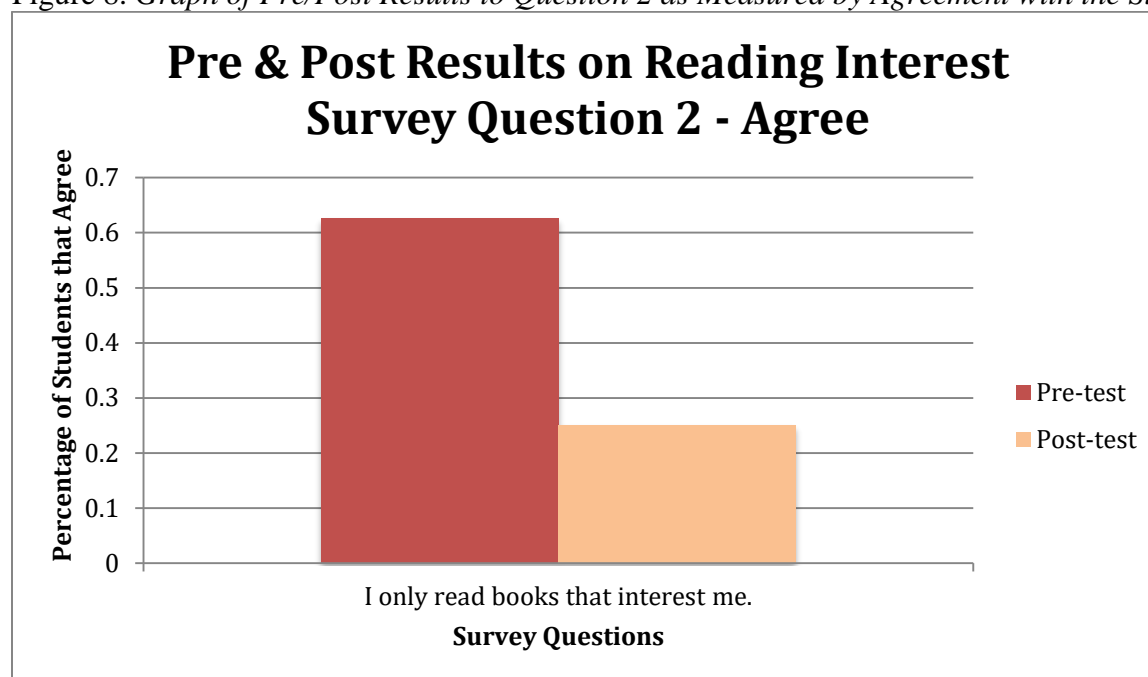


Ultimately, from these tables and graphs, the level of positive increase came from students' perceptions of reading.

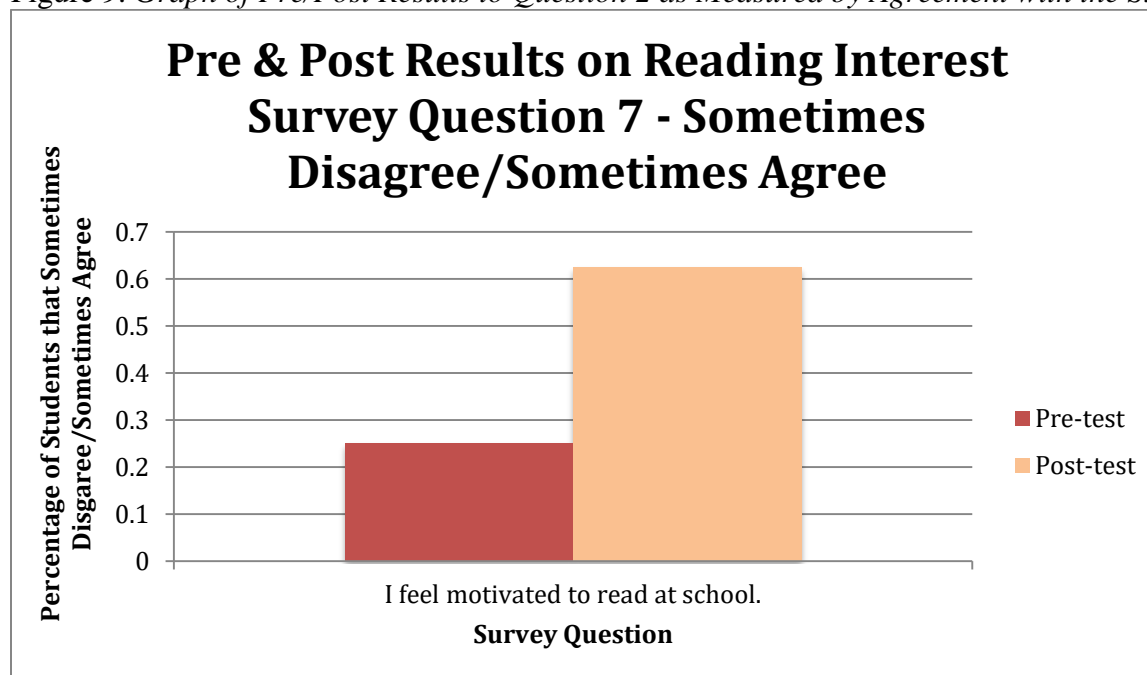
Negative Increase. On the other hand, there were two questions that yielded a negative response after the implementation of independent choice in SSR.

For question two, Figure 8 below show students decreased in their agreement that they only read books that interested them after participating in the SSR intervention from 62.5% to 25%.

Figure 8. *Graph of Pre/Post Results to Question 2 as Measured by Agreement with the Statement*



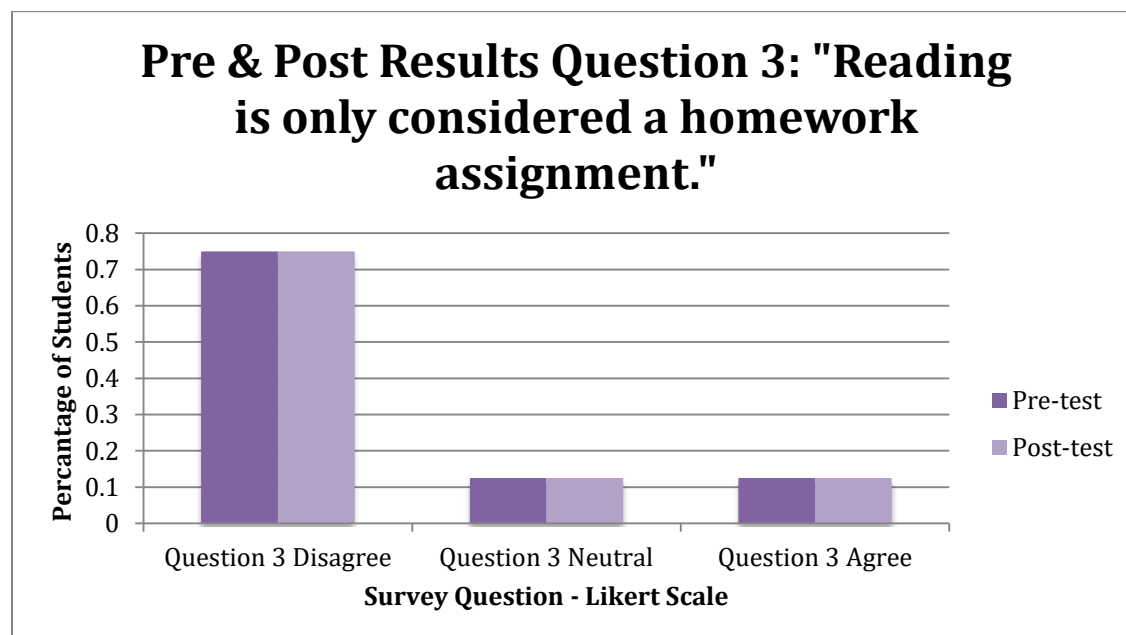
In Figure 9 below, question seven appears as if students had a positive increase in their motivation to read at school; however, the results indicated participants who moved up from disagree to neutral as well as down from agree to neutral. Participants moved from 25% sometimes agree/sometimes disagree to 62.5% sometimes agree/sometimes disagree. This data indicates that SSR had an impact both negatively and positively when it came to motivating students to read.

Figure 9. *Graph of Pre/Post Results to Question 2 as Measured by Agreement with the Statement*

Stagnant. The remaining questions showed neither an increase nor a decrease in response rate. Even though these numbers did not change pre-post, it does not mean that SSR had a negative impact.

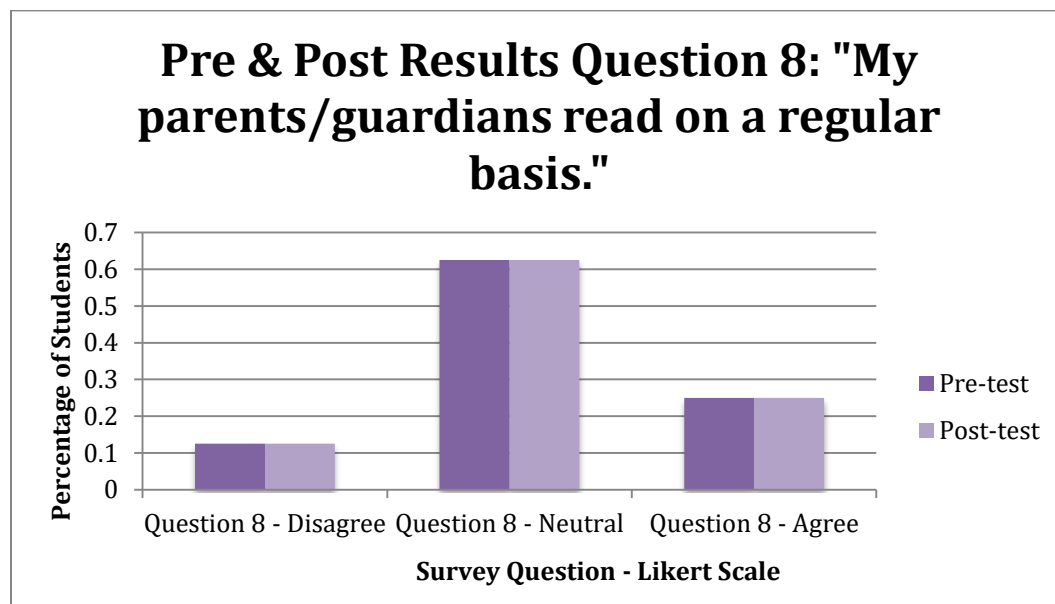
For example, Figure 10 below, the majority of students, 75%, disagreed that reading was just a homework assignment, 12.5% were neutral, and 12.5% agreed. By the end of SSR all of the same students kept their original opinion.

Figure 10. *Graph of Pre/Post Results to Question 3 as Measured by Disagree, Neutral and Agree Responses*



Additionally, in Figure 11, students took a neutral standpoint on their exposure to reading at home in relation to their parents reading habits. Results stayed at 12.5% disagree, 62.5% neutral, and 25% agree. Once again, even though the results remained stagnant, it does not mean there was a negative outcome.

Figure 11. *Graph of Pre/Post Results to Question 8 as Measured by Disagree, Neutral and Agree Responses*



Ultimately, the results indicate a positive increase in students' perceptions of reading, but data could suggest a stronger need of support and motivation with the reading process.

Short Answer Question

Lastly, after filling out the nine Likert Scale statements, students filled out a single short answer: how can teachers support you in your reading experience? Answers were taken from both pre and post results.

In the beginning, many of the responses reflected the same idea:

Student 1: "Let me read whatever I want."

Student 3: "Give me time to read."

Student 7: "Give me 15 minutes at the beginning of class to read."

Student 6: "I don't know"

From teacher observation of responses, it seemed as if they were just reiterating what I said when I introduced SSR at the beginning of the study. However, when I looked at the post-

test responses, the students had gained a stronger sense of what they expected from their reading experience:

Student 1: “Help me figure out what interests me.”

Student 4: “Give me time to figure out what I like.”

Student 5: “Teachers could have a stack of books about the topic they are teaching and just let us read it on our own.”

Student 6: “[Teachers] should encourage it more.”

While these are not all of the responses, they reflect the participant population as a whole. The remaining answers agreed with the above statements in different words.

Discussion

After collecting and analyzing the results of the study, including a released SOL Reading Comprehension test, surveys, and an SSR follow-up activity, three main themes emerged: awareness vs. participation, reality of my part, and students' interests.

Awareness vs. Participation

With regards to students' feelings about reading, students are aware that reading is an important skill, and it needs to occur outside of the English classroom. Student six stated in her survey, "The only ones who really encourage [reading] anymore are English teachers" – this idea was reflected in students' survey results. Students knew that reading is important. They knew that the outside world and school systems should be encouraging it as more than just an SOL assessment.

Through the SSR intervention, it was hard to determine if students actually liked being able to read whatever they wanted. While the overall purpose of the independent choice SSR program was to give students a more positive relationship with reading by motivating them to read what interests them, the survey indicated that students still lacked the motivation to read at school. Another student stated in his post-test survey that, "we only read during English." Another student said, "I wish we had SSR in all of our classes." Student responses acknowledge that reading is not supported in other disciplines, so while they knew they should be reading, and it is an important skill, there is no consistency in participation in promoting that idea.

Students' Interests

Based on my teacher observations I noticed that students had no idea what interested them. Simply giving students the materials that I thought would interest them was not enough to motivate students to read. The obstacle with this notion is that I assumed that ninth grade

students knew what they liked to read and what interests them – I was wrong. While there is not concrete data that reflects this idea, I noticed that it took them all of two seconds to walk over to the bin and grab a random book. Students were given the chance to read anything they wanted; now, I brought in two boxes of young adult literature, I never once told them they *had* to choose from these boxes – it was just my way of providing resources. The classroom also had a giant stack of newspapers, but students did not touch those or even glance at them. When I would randomly ask students if they liked their book, I got numerous shrugged shoulders and a couple of “I guess.” They did not take the time to look through all of the resources or even branch out of the idea of reading being synonymous with novels.

The whole purpose of this study was to determine if an increased level of independent choice in an SSR program would have an impact; however, students were not able to utilize this because they did not have time to discover their interests. Through looking at responses to the short answer of the reading interest survey, students acknowledged that they wanted the teacher to take the time and help them figure out what they wanted to read. For a generation that does not like reading and a society that does not encourage reading for fun, ninth graders have never had the time or need to figure out their relationship with reading. Within this study, I simply threw them into this new process, and just like other interactions with read, it became about just picking a book and being forced to read it because it is what the teacher wanted.

Reality of my Part

There was some evidence in the survey responses that showed a need for teacher involvement in students’ interests. As mentioned in my procedure, I was supposed to have participated in teacher modeling. However, each day, I would not start SSR until a couple of minutes after the students, and even when I did participate my mind was thinking of the to-do list

that I needed to get done. A couple of times I caught myself staring off into space thinking of everything I could be doing instead of reading. Ultimately, my participants did not get to see me fully engaged with the reading, which could have enhanced their feelings that teachers do not themselves participate in reading. It is hard to expect students to be engaged with the process when I could not do it myself. Yoon (2002) states “role modeling is a crucial factor for reading attitude acquisition and development” (p. 188).

Students do not see their parents read; teachers tend to do other things while students read silently – they do not see their awareness of the importance of reading reflected. Their lack of interest in reading stems from the awareness that no one participates in encouraging the importance of reading. While I did not measure this aspect of the SSR intervention, I do wonder if my lack of focus during the process had an impact on their feelings about reading. There were numerous times my eyes would wander while I thought about the lesson I needed to prepare, or I thought about the meeting I had to go to after school. In my mind, I knew I could be doing so many other things during that 15 minutes, did my lack of focus influence their perception of SSR?

Conclusion and Implications

With that, my topic addressed the notion that encouraging reading by motivating students through their interests would help increase the overall reading process. Students tend to see reading as an assignment instead of a necessary everyday skill; the purpose of this research was to bring reading back to basics in hopes that they would develop a more positive relationship with reading and therefore increase their motivation and achievement. Based on this, my research question sought to answer what impact, if any, does independent choice in sustained silent reading have on students' comprehension and overall feelings about reading.

Limitations

With any teacher-conducted research, there are going to be numerous limitations that influence results.

Time Constraint. Originally, this study was supposed to take place over six weeks; however, due to an enormous amount of snow days and power outages, the study got pushed back and condensed. The study was supposed to begin in late January, but I did not get to implement SSR until mid-way through March. Students were flustered, out of sync, and interrupted with all of the days out of school. It was hard to get the back into the swing of things and re-establish the classroom routine.

As mentioned, the weather had an implication on time, changing the research design from six weeks to two weeks. There was not enough time to fully talk to the students about SSR and the overall purpose of the research. Additionally, anyone who teaches knows that there is just never enough time in the day. There were some days that I had to cut SSR short because I just had too much to do during that block. Sustained Silent Reading took a back seat to instructional

time. This is mainly because of the snow; my mentor teacher and I got incredibly behind and in trying to catch up, the research was condensed.

Student Population and Absences. One major limitation is the fact that I only had eight participants out of 21 students, so it was not an accurate representation of the student population. While it still offered a variety of reading levels, eight students' success or failures does not help determine the overall impact of the study on high schools students in general.

Furthermore, within those eight participants, there were a couple of absences during the process, so they were not consistent with when and how often they received the SSR intervention. While I was able to call them in during homeroom to make up the work, such as read silently, or complete a post-test that they missed, they were not able to experience the routine they would have gotten had they been in class. There were some days they would come in for homeroom, but they would not have English that day due to block scheduling. There was a lot of inconsistency of the intervention.

Independent Choice. Lastly, this limitation held the most weight in my study. Because I did not take the time to help students figure out what they liked to read, they were not able to fully adopt the idea of independent choice.

I offered books and magazines and then told them they could bring in their own materials – every single student picked from the bin of books that I brought in. I am not confident that they spent time picking something that would hold their interest. Therefore, my findings do not offer any insight into whether independent choice had an impact on their reading comprehension or overall feelings about reading.

Correlation. The basis of my research stemmed from the National Reading Panel's findings that Sustained Silent Reading did not impact students' reading comprehension or

reading achievement (National Institute, 200). From this, I decided to implement the element of independent choice to determine if students' success correlated with reading that actually interested them.

Even though the data collection and numbers indicate that students did improve after the implementation of an SSR intervention, there are too many factors within a class period and school day that could have impacted the growth. Additionally, with the research taking place three quarters of the way through the year, students should have already had a strong foundation for comprehension skill, and their growth could have been a reflection of the natural progression of student growth.

Future Research

Due to the large amount of limitations, I was able to reflect on ideas for future research. While some can be implemented together, others are generalized ideas to help improve students' relationships and perceptions of reading.

First, by offering more time and consistency in the structure of SSR, educators could gain a larger insight into what the real impact of such a program could do.

Second, some schools have done such programs as Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), and while this idea is good intentioned, I believe with some improvements, it could be more successful. While the purpose is to have everyone in the school read for a set amount of time, I think having everyone read content specific material for that designated time would be a more beneficial use of instructional times. For example, if you are in a science class, when participating in DEAR, instead of just reading random materials, the teacher could have a stack of reading materials about whatever topic they are discussing in order for students to learn on their own.

This brings me to my next piece of advice; teachers should offer the multiple resources that students can read. Because I only brought in books, my students only read books instead of choosing any source of material. While I know this is hard for teachers because we largely have to supply our own materials, if we *show* the students that there are other reading choices besides novels and textbooks then they may have a stronger sense of motivation.

Lastly, during my study, I distinctly separated Sustained Silent Reading and instructional time. I believe this significantly hurt students success in the SSR program. I recommend referring back to students reading in SSR during instructional time. For example, if I am teaching a lesson about theme, instead of providing small sample readings where they have to find the theme make them reflect on their SSR material – what themes did you notice in your reading time at the beginning of class? This offers a support for SSR and shows students the purpose behind having an SSR program.

Implications

Ultimately, the purpose of this research was to see if getting students interested and motivated in reading would help them increase their reading achievement and make them enjoy reading. While their relationship did not culminate in a positive motivation, it did enhance their perceptions of reading. While my findings did agree with the National Reading Panel's findings, my analysis of pre- and post assessments, coding of reading interest, and teacher observations show that it is possible to involve students' interests in the reading process. However, until an effective SSR program can be implemented, I do not think such an intervention is the best method for increasing overall reading achievement.

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Appendix A**Name:****Date:**

Directions: Read each question and circle a number, 1, 2, or 3, based on if you agree or disagree with the statement.

1= I disagree

2= Sometimes agree/ Sometimes disagree

3= I agree

1. I like to read.

1 2 3

2. I only read books that interest me.

1 2 3

3. Reading is only considered a homework assignment.

1 2 3

4. I believe my peers like to read for fun.

1 2 3

5. Being able to choose what I want to read makes me want to read more.

1 2 3

6. Reading is only important in English class.

1 2 3

7. I feel motivated to read at school.

1 2 3

8. My parents/ guardians read on a regular basis.

1 2 3

9. I do not think reading is important.

1 2 3

10. How can teachers support you in your reading experience?

Appendix B**Reading Comprehension Questions:****No Frozen Fish Here!**

- 1 Some of the coldest water in the world surrounds the continent of Antarctica. In fact, the water temperature is actually below freezing, around 28.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Ordinarily, water would freeze at 32 degrees, but the salt in seawater lowers the freezing point. Indeed, the temperature is so low that ice crystals float in the water.
- 2 Given the water temperature, one must wonder how fish thrive in the water around Antarctica. After all, the tissues and fluids in a fish freeze at 30.2 degrees, which should make the water surrounding Antarctica uninhabitable. Moreover, any fish in the area would ingest ice crystals with each mouthful. Despite these facts, many fish do live in the water of Antarctica. For nearly 50 years scientists have studied these fish, noting their exceptional capabilities.

Notothenioids

- 3 Scientists call the fish that can survive such conditions notothenioids [nō-tō-thīnē'-oidz]. Antarctica boasts more than 120 species of such fish that can flourish in freezing water. These species include many types of fish unique to Antarctica. The threadfin pithead, for instance, lives at depths of around 2,000 feet in the cold dark of the Antarctic seas. It is difficult to imagine a more adverse environment. One of the most resilient species is the bald notothen, a fish that possesses unique physical features to ensure its survival in this environment. The mottled black and white appearance of the bald notothen, popularly called a "bork," provides excellent camouflage while it swims under the layer of ice floating on the ocean. The slender fish spends its days swimming through the honeycombed channels of the icepack hunting krill—small crustaceans—for its sustenance.

Directions: Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.



The Question

- 4 With the establishment of McMurdo Station in 1956, scientists enjoyed an outpost that allowed them to study Antarctica up close. One of the first questions addressed had to do with the presence of fish in the region's below-freezing water. The central question was really a very basic one: how do fish, whose tissues and fluids should freeze at temperatures below 30.2 degrees, survive in the Antarctic water? Even swallowing the ice crystals in the water would be sufficient for freezing and killing most fish species.
- 5 Scientists at McMurdo Station analyzed the notothenioids in the 1960s. They were astonished to discover that the different species of fish had one thing in common: a protein present in their blood that was missing in other species of fish common to warmer regions. This protein, researchers theorized, must serve as a kind of antifreeze.

AFGP

- 6 Scientists named the mysterious protein antifreeze glycoprotein, or AFGP; it exists in the bloodstream of all the fish that inhabit the Antarctic waters, such as the "borks," that dart in and out of the ice channels. Interestingly, the protein does not warm the blood; rather, it attaches to ice crystals and prevents them from connecting to one another. Only recently have scientists discovered that the fish's pancreas produces the protein and secretes it into its intestines. Scientists believe this process occurs because the ice crystals, which enter into the stomach and intestine, pose one of the first dangers to fish in very cold water. This salutary protein targets those ice crystals and also enters the bloodstream, thereby preventing freezing from taking place in the circulatory system.

Directions: Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

**Human Applications**

- 7 The same protein that fish use to keep their fluids and tissues from freezing has a wide range of potential applications for people. AFGP can aid in preserving organs for transplant. Researchers believe it might even be valuable as a deicer because it is 300 times more powerful than chemical antifreeze. In the area of food production, the protein could be used to ensure that frozen foods taste fresher.
- 8 The adaptive capabilities of these extraordinary fish still attract scientists to probe even further, even to this day. Studying the creatures of the Antarctic area could eventually enhance or improve many aspects of our lives. Perhaps more useful secrets lurk in the deep water of Antarctica.

Directions: Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.



In the online version of the test, the reading passage appears on the left side of the screen.

In the online version of the test, the reading passage appears on the left side of the screen.

Directions: Click on the correct answer.

The information in paragraph 2 supports the idea that Antarctic fish —

- ☐ adapt to cold water
- ☐ struggle to find food
- ☐ produce fatty layers of tissue
- ☐ migrate to avoid ice
- ☐ receive nutrition from crystals

Read these sentences from paragraph 3.

The threadfin pithead, for instance, lives at depths of around 2,000 feet in the cold dark of the Antarctic seas. It is difficult to imagine a more adverse environment.

These sentences suggest that the author —

- ☐ A admires the unspoiled beauty of Antarctica
- ☐ B appreciates the kinds of life Antarctica supports
- ☐ C is disappointed that so little is known about Antarctica
- ☐ D is dissatisfied that people wrongly see Antarctica as a lifeless place

In the online version of the test, the reading passage appears on the left side of the screen.

Read this sentence from paragraph 3.

The slender fish spends its days swimming through the honeycombed channels of the icepack hunting krill—small crustaceans—for its sustenance.

The word sustenance means —

- ☐ A nourishment
- ☐ B camouflage
- ☐ C navigation
- ☐ D protection

In the online version of the test, the reading passage appears on the left side of the screen.

Which statement best expresses the main idea of paragraph 3?

- ☐ A Fish that live in Antarctic water are called notothenioids.
- ☐ B Fish in the Antarctic Ocean have specialized coloring to hide from predators.
- ☐ C The features of the bald notothen fish help it dominate Antarctic waters.
- ☐ D Many types of fish thrive in the water around Antarctica.

In the online version of the test, the reading passage appears on the left side of the screen.

In paragraph 6, the word salutary means —

- ☐ A individual
- ☐ B energetic
- ☐ C beneficial
- ☐ D invisible

In the online version of the test, the reading passage appears on the left side of the screen.

Which section would most likely describe future uses of the protein found in fish that live in below-freezing water?

- ☐ A Notothenioids
- ☐ B The Question
- ☐ C AFGP
- ☐ D Human Applications

In the online version of the test, the reading passage appears on the left side of the screen.

What is the author's most likely purpose for writing this selection?

- ☐ A To explain how some fish can survive in challenging conditions
- ☐ B To prove that studying fish can be an economic boon for humans
- ☐ C To establish that McMurdo Station performs an important function
- ☐ D To highlight a certain fish that lives in the waters around Antarctica

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/released_tests/2015/eoc_reading_released_in_spring_2015.pdf

Appendix C

SSR Worksheet:

Summarize:

Write a brief summary of what you read during the 15-minute period. What was the main idea? If you were explaining it to someone who has never read it before, what would *they* need to know to understand the reading?

Vocabulary:

Are there any words that you did not know? Were you able to define them based on the context? Write down the words and give what YOU think it means.

Term 1:

Definition:

Reflection: Circle a face. Did you like the reading? Was it boring? Did you enjoy SSR today?



Appendix D

Parent and/or Guardian Consent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Hello, my name is Miss Roach, and I am a student teacher in your child's classroom. I am currently a graduate student at the University of Mary Washington in which I am in the process of receiving my Masters in Secondary Education. As part of our program, we are required to conduct an action research study that is related to our content area. **I would like to invite your child to participate in my research study; however, involvement is completely voluntary, so you may have the option to exempt your child as a participant.** Here is a little background on what my research will be studying.

I am interested in determining if student choice in reading material within a Sustained Silent Reading program will influence student reading comprehension and feelings about reading. This will take place over a period of six weeks in which I will meet with your child's class about 15 separate times. **I am requesting permission to give your child a survey about his or her feelings on reading as well as questions from released SOL reading comprehension test. I will be collecting students' daily guided reading worksheets and conducting classroom observations while taking notes. I am also requesting to conduct interviews with select students. I will not be doing interviews with every student, only a handful that have turned in both parent consent and student assent forms.**

If you do not want your child to be in the study, they will still have to participate in the reading activities, worksheets, surveys, and tests that all students in the class are doing, but I will not use their information from these things in my study. If your child is allowed to participate then your child's work will be kept confidential. His or her name will not appear in any papers in the project. All names will be changed to protect his or her privacy. Following the project, all worksheets, surveys, interview notes, field notes and tests I collect will be destroyed. Participation in this project will not affect your child's grade in any way. His or her participation in the study is voluntary, and you have the right to keep your child out of the study. Also, your child is free to stop participating in the study at any time.

If you choose to let your child participate in the study, you will help me understand what kinds of reading motivates students and keeps them engaged with the process. It will also offer insight into whether student choice can help enhance students' overall understanding and comprehension. A small risk may come from students' discomfort in being interviewed by one of their teachers, but I will inform them that anything they say can be stricken from the record. They will also be informed that they do not have to answer every question if they do not wish to.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my university supervisor, Dr. Penny Causarano (pcausara@umw.edu), myself (kroach2@mail.umw.edu).

The University of Mary Washington IRB has approved the research described above, which is a committee responsible for ensuring that research is being conducted safely and that risks to

participants are minimized. For information about the review of this research, contact the IRB chair, Dr. Jo Tyler at jtyler@umw.edu.

Thank you,

Miss Roach

I have read the above letter and give my child, _____, permission to participate in this project.

(Parent/Guardian Signature)

(Parent/ Guardian Print Name)

Date

I, _____ agree to keep all information and data collected during this research project confidential.

(Researcher Signature)

Date

Appendix E
Student Assent Letter (SSR Intervention)

Dear Student,

I am very excited to be working with you this year! We are going to do some things a little differently for a short period of time, so let me explain what you can expect. Reading is a big part of our English classroom, and I want to share a new activity with you all. We will begin a program called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), where we will spend 15 minutes at the beginning of class reading materials of your choosing.

While you participate in this program, I will be collecting information for my research project. I am asking your permission to use the information I collect about you in my research project. Your decision is entirely voluntary, but before you decide let me explain what it involves. This research is studying whether allowing you to choose your own texts has an impact on your feelings about reading and your understanding of reading. During this study, you will be given a pre and post-test on reading comprehension. Remember, we have done this a couple of times, just like in the Short Story Unit when you had to read “The Lottery” and answer questions. In this pre and post-test, you will be given a survey on your feelings about reading and also be required to read a small passage and answer seven questions. During the lessons you will fill out worksheets about what you read and how you liked it. I will also be conducting interviews before and after the unit with some of you where I will be asking questions about your thoughts on reading and taking notes on what you say.

Your parents were given a letter about taking part in this study. If your parents did not allow you to participate in this study, you will not be asked to sign this form. However, if your parents did allow you to participate, I encourage you to participate in this study.

I want you to know that you do not have to participate in this study. Nothing will happen, your grade will not be affected, and no one will be upset with you if you choose not to participate. It is entirely up to you and your parent whether you choose to participate or not. If you choose not to participate, you will still complete the same activities as the rest of the class, but your work WILL NOT appear in my research and I will not ask to interview you.

If you decide to be in the study, I will keep your information confidential. This means that I will not use your names or the name of the school in anything I write and I will not reveal any personal, identifying information about you.

Signing this form means that you have read it or have had it read to you, and that you are willing to be in this study. If at any point you have any questions, please ask me!

Thanks,

Miss Roach

I have been read the above letter, all my questions have been answered, and I agree to participate in the project.

(Student Signature)

(Print Student Name)

Date

I, _____ will keep your names confidential.

(Student Teacher/Researcher Signature)

Date